



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice China

China – CHN36767 – Liaoning Province –  
Shenyang – Christians – Proselytising –  
Schools  
29 June 2010

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**1. What is the attitude of authorities in Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, to Christians generally, and to evangelising Christians specifically?**

The attitude of authorities in Liaoning Province toward Christians could be characterised as permissive, within the bounds of the Chinese constitution and within the limits of regulations governing the practice of religion. There is reporting indicating that Christians are possibly permitted more state-sanctioned activities in Liaoning Province than in others. In the last several years, there is also some evidence that there are fewer anti-Christian incidents taking place in this province in comparison to others. Evangelical Christians and proselytising activities in Liaoning, however, would not be tolerated by authorities, and these activities would be subject to the same constraints and strict prohibitions that are in force throughout China. It is very likely, for example, that a teacher who is reported to authorities for reading the Bible to kindergarten students would face consequences. Provincial authorities would likely determine such activity violates several regulations of lawful conduct of religious activities, including ordinances against religious activity in unregistered venues and other prohibitions against proselytising outside registered venues. Punishment for such activities, including school closure, detention, and imprisonment are plausible.

A number of reports located indicate that Liaoning Province has, for a number of years, been a fairly permissive environment, by Chinese standards, for Christians to practice religion, as long as adherents do so within guidelines mandated by the government. The following reports are provided in support of this conclusion.

A 2009 article in *The Independent* acknowledges that, while public promotion of Christianity in Liaoning remains prohibited, unusual adaptations exist. For example, report states that plans for China's first Bible theme park (a tourism project costing \$US659 million) to be built in Liaoning province are underway. Hong Kong based businessman Moon-lam Leung, a devout Christian, said the Harmony World park would feature high-tech attractions to tell the stories of Chinese and Western civilisation, including biblical references. The article notes that "Leung admitted having to tread carefully as authorities had made clear that while the development was allowed, promotion of the Christian faith was strictly banned."<sup>1</sup>

According to the US Department of State<sup>2</sup>, in 2007 a large Christian Korean community was thriving in Liaoning with churches operating openly and an operating seminary.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Businessmen to build China's first Bible theme park' 2009, *The Independent*, 24 November <http://www.independent.co.uk/incoming/businessmen-to-build-chinas-first-bible-theme-park-1826554.html> – Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 1.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of State 2007, *China Profile of Asylum Claims and Country Conditions*, May [http://www.pards.org/paccc/china\\_may\\_2007.doc](http://www.pards.org/paccc/china_may_2007.doc) – Accessed 4 March 2009, Chapter 3, Section C.3 – Attachment 2.

China Aid Association, a non-profit Christian organisation based in the United States releases an annual report on the treatment of unregistered Christians in China. The China Aid report for 2007 included a chart depicting the number of people persecuted and arrested for illegally practicing religion across 19 Provinces. Liaoning registered among the lowest of all provinces, recording only one incident<sup>3</sup> (described below). There were no reported incidents in 2008 or 2009.

The 2006 US Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)<sup>4</sup> annual report found that government officials in Liaoning stood out among other Communist Party officials in standing for freedom of religious principles. When a 2005 internal Communist Party study revealed that 20 million out of 60 million Communist Party members engage in religious activities, several party leaders called for religious adherents to be expelled as they threatened the official ideology of the Party. It was party members from Liaoning Province that reportedly expressed their disagreement with this position and countered that it was time to permit Party members to believe in and practice religion.<sup>5</sup> This indicates a degree of official leniency towards Christianity in the province.

According to the 2006 edition of *China's Christian Millions* publication, as of 2002 there were over 600,000 Protestants meeting in over 1,400 registered churches and other meeting places in Liaoning.<sup>6</sup> This indicates a fairly fertile environment for Christians. Other information about Christians in Liaoning from the 2006 edition of *China's Christian Millions* publication is more dated, but points to a sizeable Christian population operating under the auspices of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TPSM), the government agency regulating religious activity. For example, the TPSM reported in 1993 that in Liaoning there were 10,000 believers meeting in 16 churches and 100 registered meeting places. In 1994, the total Christian population was estimated to be 140,000 including 80,000 Roman Catholics.

Information contained in Research Response CHN33443<sup>7</sup>, dated 3 June 2008, does list several incidents of harassment and harm against Christians in the 2002 – 2003 period in Liaoning. The China21.org website, a US-based group which concentrates on the persecution of Christians and religious adherents in China, reported several incidents that involved harm to Christians, including beatings, detention, and torture. Corroborating information sources could not be located. It is possible that such incidents are suppressed by authorities and this may be the only source that was able to gather information on these incidents.

Only one fairly recent incident of mistreatment specifically against a Christian who had engaged in proselytism in Liaoning was found in the sources consulted. According to the 2007 annual report of the non-profit Christian organisation, China Aid Association, in March 2007, Ms Guo Changrong was arrested for “preaching the Gospel to the village party secretary”. Ms Changrong was reportedly sentenced to one year of education through labour.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> China Aid Association 2008, *Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China: January 2007 – December 2007*, February, p.7  
<http://chinaaid.org/pdf/2007%20persecution%20report/caa%202007%20annual%20persecution%20report%20english.pdf> – Accessed 4 March 2009 – Attachment 3.

<sup>4</sup> US Congressional – Executive Commission on China 2006, *Annual Report 2006*, 20 September, p.94.  
<http://www.cecc.gov/pages/annualrpt/annualrpt06/religion.php> – Accessed on 11 January 2006 – Attachment 4

<sup>5</sup> US Congressional – Executive Commission on China 2006, *Annual Report 2006*, 20 September, p.94.  
<http://www.cecc.gov/pages/annualrpt/annualrpt06/religion.php> – Accessed on 11 January 2006 – Attachment 4.

<sup>6</sup> Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, OMF Publishing, Monarch Books, London, 2nd ed, pp. 261-262 – Attachment 5.

<sup>7</sup> RRT Research & Information 2008, Research Response CHN33443, 5 June – Attachment 6.

<sup>8</sup> China Aid Association 2008, *Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China: January 2007 – December 2007*, February, p.7  
<http://chinaaid.org/pdf/2007%20persecution%20report/caa%202007%20annual%20persecution%20report%20english.pdf>

Most sources consulted portray a fairly permissive environment in Liaoning for practicing Christians who adhere to regulations. That said, it is a logical expectation that blatant proselytising activities, especially ones in which public complaints are lodged, would certainly be dealt with swiftly and according to regulations mandating sanctions and punitive action. The likelihood that punitive actions are taken for such actions in Liaoning is similar across China. Such general prohibitions and trends are summarised below.

### **Prohibitions against religious activity in unregistered locations and proselytising**

In China, all citizens are subject to legal restrictions which specifically limit proselytising and evangelism, and Liaoning Province is no exception. In China, those who engage in proselytising outside of these restrictions can face administrative detention, fines, and re-education through labour sentences according to regulations. The 2009 US Department of State (USDOS) religious freedom report states that: “The Government permits proselytism in registered places of worship and in private settings, but does not permit it in public, in unregistered places of worship, or by foreigners.”<sup>9</sup> According to the 2009 annual report of the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), authorities often punish anyone who proselytises with administrative detention, including sentencing to re-education through labour.<sup>10</sup> People acting in the circumstances described could readily be found to be in violation of these regulations and it is very likely that authorities in Liaoning Province would invoke relevant statutes to close a kindergarten and to sanction such Christians.

Across China, authorities govern religious activity according to provisions in the national Regulations on Religious Affairs (RRA). Government restrictions on proselytising are imposed by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC), which are the official (and overlapping) state-led organisations that represent and manage Protestant movements in China. The RRA does not include criminal penalties for violations; however, authorities use the PRC Criminal Law and other legal provisions to punish religious practices outside of approved parameters.<sup>11</sup>

The CECC report<sup>12</sup> found that during 2009, the central government continued to strictly control religious practice and repress such practice outside state-approved parameters. Local governments supported these measures, in some cases destroying sites of worship, detaining people, and imprisoning believers. The report also stated that any religious group must apply to register with the government and submit to state control over their affairs. Not adhering to these directives meant that these groups risked harassment, detention, closure of sites, and other abuses.

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[glish.pdf](#) – Accessed 4 March 2009 – Attachment 3. Also see: Xi, L. 2007, ‘Beijing Christian Arrested for Spreading Gospel’, China Aid Association website, source: *Epoch Times*, 6 April [http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&\\_function=detail&sbtblct\\_uid1=649&\\_nc=a36d1dbe0dc34d373037b39f963d8247](http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=649&_nc=a36d1dbe0dc34d373037b39f963d8247) – Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 7.

<sup>9</sup> US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, Macau)*, 26 October – Attachment 8.

<sup>10</sup> US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009, *Annual Report 2009*, 10 October, p. 132 Attachment 9

<sup>11</sup> US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009, *Annual Report 2009*, 10 October, p. 132 – Attachment 9.

<sup>12</sup> US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009, *Annual Report 2009*, 10 October, p. 113 – Attachment 9

The CECC report<sup>13</sup> specifically addressed the issue of children and religion, stating: ‘Children faced continued restrictions on their right to freedom of religion, and parents and guardians faced restrictions on their right to impart a religious education to children.’ The report found that even in circumstances where parents willingly sought religious education for their children, there were instances where authorities supported efforts to prevent children from participating. These instances were not further described. This trend, however, would produce an even greater inclination for authorities to punish a kindergarten teacher using religious materials to instruct children whose parents were not seeking such instruction.

## **2. Are there reports of kindergartens or schools closed in this area for this type of claimed activity? In China generally?**

No reports were located of authorities closing kindergartens or schools for unlawful religious instruction in Liaoning Province, in any of the sources consulted. A broader search for reports on authorities closing schools for such activity across China, produced only two reports, both from a single source. The incidents, which occurred in 2007, were of a very general nature, and are described below. The Chinese government prohibition on the conduct of religious activities outside authorised locations, more than likely dissuades most Chinese citizens from proselytising to children in a school. The risk of exposure by children speaking to their parents about such activities at school, and this information subsequently coming to the attention of authorities, is very great. That said, it is plausible that some fervently evangelical Christians working in schools may still feel compelled to take the risk and proselytise to children in a classroom setting. It is logical to presume that these activities are dealt with expediently by authorities, especially if parents complain. It is also possible that such incidents may be suppressed in the Chinese media by local authorities, seeking to avoid attention from the central government.

The only source located remotely describing the closure of a children’s school for religious violations was found, in The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada’s report entitled: *Broken Promises: The Protestant Experience With Religious Freedom In China In Advance Of The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games*.<sup>14</sup> The report states that as a matter of course in China, ‘Any religious gathering that is not previously authorized becomes a criminal offence.’ In a very general sense, the report states in the context of the prohibitions against unauthorised religious instruction that in 2007, two youth camps in an undisclosed location were ‘attacked’ and leaders arrested. Another, very general reference is made to an incident in another undisclosed location where four Sunday school teachers were arrested and several children detained. No further details were provided about the circumstances surrounding these incidents.

## **3. Deleted.**

### **Attachments**

1. ‘Businessmen to build China’s first Bible theme park’ 2009, *The Independent*, 24 November <http://www.independent.co.uk/incoming/businessmen-to-build-chinas-first-bible-theme-park-1826554.html> – Accessed 2 March 2010.

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<sup>13</sup> US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009, *Annual Report 2009*, 10 October, p. 111-112 – Attachment 9.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Broken Promises: The Protestant Experience With Religious Freedom In China In Advance Of The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games’ 2008, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, June [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca) - Accessed 28 June 2010 – Attachment 10.

2. US Department of State 2007, *China Profile of Asylum Claims and Country Conditions*, May [http://www.pards.org/paccc/china\\_may\\_2007.doc](http://www.pards.org/paccc/china_may_2007.doc) Chapter 3, Section C.3 – Accessed 4 March 2009.
3. China Aid Association 2008, *Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China: January 2007 – December 2007*, February, p.7  
<http://chinaaid.org/pdf/2007%20persecution%20report/caa%202007%20annual%20persecution%20report%20english.pdf> – Accessed 4 March 2009.
4. US Congressional – Executive Commission on China 2006, *Annual Report*, 20 September, p.94. <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/annualrpt/annualrpt06/religion.php> – Accessed on 11 January 2006.
5. Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, OMF Publishing, Monarch Books, London, 2nd ed, pp. 261-262.
6. RRT Research & Information 208, Research Response CHN33443, 5 June.
7. Xi, L. 2007, 'Beijing Christian Arrested for Spreading Gospel', China Aid Association website, source: *Epoch Times*, 6 April  
[http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&function=detail&sbtblct\\_uid1=649&nc=a36d1dbe0dc34d373037b39f963d8247](http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=649&nc=a36d1dbe0dc34d373037b39f963d8247) – Accessed 2 March 2010.
8. US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, Macau)*, 26 October.
9. US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009, *Annual Report 2009*, 10 October.
10. 'Broken Promises: The Protestant Experience With Religious Freedom In China In Advance Of The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games' 2008, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, June [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca) - Accessed 28 June 2010.
11. Deleted.